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C O N F I D E N T I A L SHANGHAI 000523

STATE FOR EAP/CM, INR AND DRL
NSC FOR LOI, KUCHTA-HEBLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/8/2033

TAGS: PGOV PHUM CH UN
SUBJECT: (C) HUMAN RIGHTS DAY PETITION TO CALL FOR POLITICAL REFORM

REF: SHANGHAI 522

CLASSIFIED BY: CHRISTOPHER BEEDE, POL/ECON CHIEF, US CONSULATE
SHANGHAI, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Contacts in Hangzhou said they have joined a petition calling for more political reform in China, which they said would be posted on-line o/a December 10 to coincide with UN Human Rights Day. Both contacts said China's current social and economic environment provides an opportunity for pushing the envelope on political reform, but they remain concerned about possible repercussions from signing the petition. End Summary.

(C) Intellectuals Sign Letter Calling for Political Reform

¶12. (C) Two contacts in Hangzhou, Zhejiang's provincial capital, told Poloff during a December 2-4 visit that they are among a group of approximately 400 Chinese intellectuals who have signed an open letter to the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which calls for greater political reform. The petition, which covers six broad areas of reform and details 19 specific proposals, will be posted on-line on or about December 10 in observance of United Nations Human Rights Day. According to the two contacts, many of those who have signed the letter are from East China, but they claimed activists from across the country are participating.

¶13. (C) Feng Gang, a sociology professor at Zhejiang University, showed Poloff a copy of the letter (but he would not allow Poloff to keep a copy nor would he discuss who else had signed it). The six broad areas of reform promoted in the petition are: political freedom (ziyou), human rights (renquan), equality (gongping), representative government (gonghe), democracy (minzhu), and constitutional rule (xianzheng). The letter goes on to outline 19 specific proposals for greater political reform.

(C) Activists Believe Time is Ripe for Reform...

¶14. (C) Both contacts said China's current social and economic environment provides an opportunity for pushing the envelope on political reform. Feng Gang told Poloff on December 4 that he believes the Central Government will have no choice but to yield ground on political reform. Facing declining economic prospects, the only way the Central Government will be able to maintain social order is by allowing the country's citizens greater political freedom, including stronger civil rights, Feng said. (See also reftel and previous.) He cited the taxi driver strikes in Chongqing, Guangdong, and Hainan as an example

of the economic slowdown forcing local government officials to more seriously consider the political rights of their citizens.

¶ 15. (C) Wen Kejian, an independent journalist and human rights activist, largely agreed with Feng's viewpoint. The first to tell Poloff about the petition on December 3 during a visit to Shaoxing (reftel), Wen said the economic crisis "naturally" will lead to a demand for more democracy and greater openness in China. Human Rights Day would give the 400 activists an appropriate platform to post their letter and attract attention to their political grievances.

(C) ...But These Still are Dangerous Times

¶ 16. (C) Wen, however, remains worried about the repercussions from signing the letter, and he told Poloff the petition's 400 signatories all know they are taking a risk. Wen said on December 3 that the group is taking precautions by not yet publicizing the letter and by not committing to when (December 10 or another day) or where (which website) the petition would be posted. Feng acknowledged that authorities are likely to remove the letter from the internet shortly after it is posted, but he said the group would post it again somewhere else.

¶ 17. (C) Wen expressed concern that he or others in the group may be detained as a result of the petition. Authorities continue to monitor Wen's movements, and Wen contacted Poloff on December 7 to say he had been prevented from crossing the border from Shenzhen to Hong Kong on Thursday, December 4. It was the second time this year Wen had been prevented from crossing into Hong Kong. (Note: Authorities stopped Wen from traveling via Hong Kong to the United States on July 22 to attend a conference when he was detained at the Luohu border crossing in Shenzhen and prevented from traveling despite holding a valid U.S. visa. End Note.) Wen said local authorities in Hangzhou also questioned him over the December 6-7 weekend about Poloff's December 2-4 visit to Hangzhou and Shaoxing.

(C) The Right Thing to Do

¶ 18. (C) Despite possible future ramifications, Wen and Feng both said they believe signing the letter is the right thing to do, and now is the time to push for reform. "The Government will not like (the petition)," Feng said, "but we will not stop sending the message on reform."

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